

# Piracy and Counter-Piracy Cooperation in Southeast Asia (2000-2014)

## OVERVIEW

START examined bilateral relationships and changing naval capabilities of the critical smaller powers in the region—Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore—to assess counter-piracy as an area in which United States and Chinese interests coincide and in which opportunities for partnership will smaller countries exist. We drew piracy events from the Anti-shipping Activity Messages (ASAM), which tracks reports of piracy events from across the globe and compiles detailed descriptions to create a unified database of piracy activities based on geographic locations and timing.

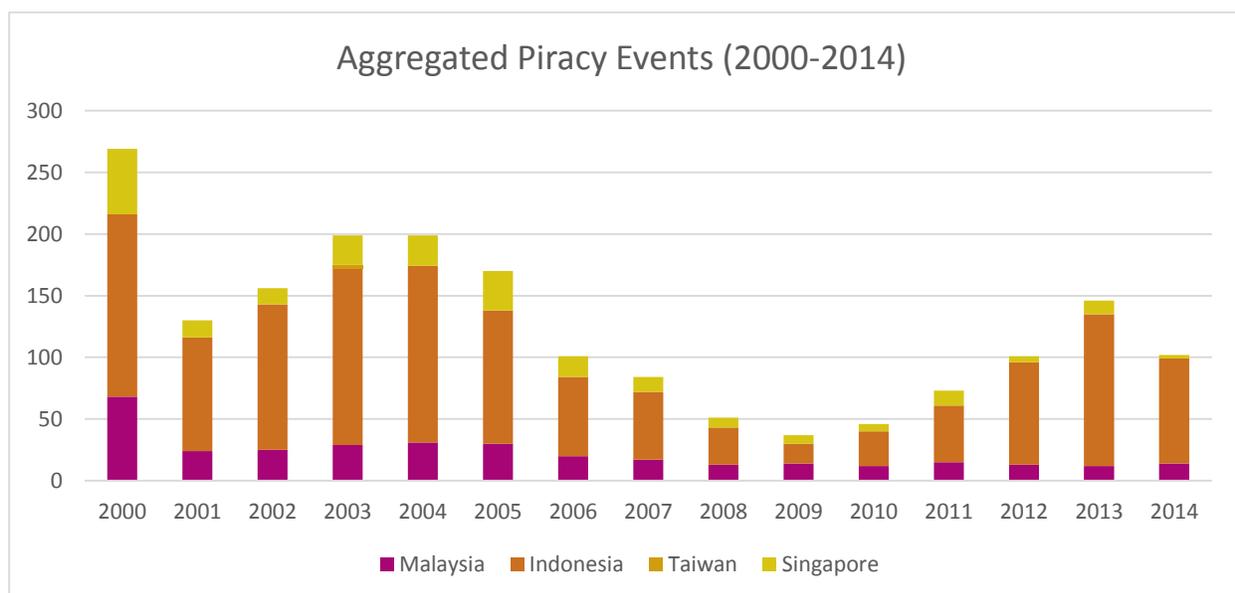
## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Our analysis area was limited to piracy events occurring near Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Singapore, with full knowledge that piracy affects other countries in the region not discussed here (especially Bangladesh), and that piracy is not unique to East and Southeast Asia (affecting East and West Africa as well). Piracy is an ongoing issue for the region’s smaller states, and it may be a larger issue for these smaller states than the relationships between the major powers. For the purposes of this analysis, we define a piracy event as: *any non-state attack on another vessel, crew or cargo which could impede cargo delivery or crew safety.*

## PROJECT FINDINGS

The number of piracy events near Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Singapore garnishes significant attention. Even though piracy is a major issue for these countries, over the past 14 years, the number of piracy attacks in the region have decreased relative to the high levels of pirate attacks in 2000. After 2004, the number of attacks began to decrease significantly as patrols and various hotspots relocated throughout the region. After 2009, however, the number of attacks began to increase steadily. In 2014, there were fewer attacks than in 2013, however still more attacks than in 2009, which saw the fewest attacks over the past 14 years. Though all the countries saw decreases in piracy over the timespan, Malaysia and then Singapore experienced the largest decline in attacks.

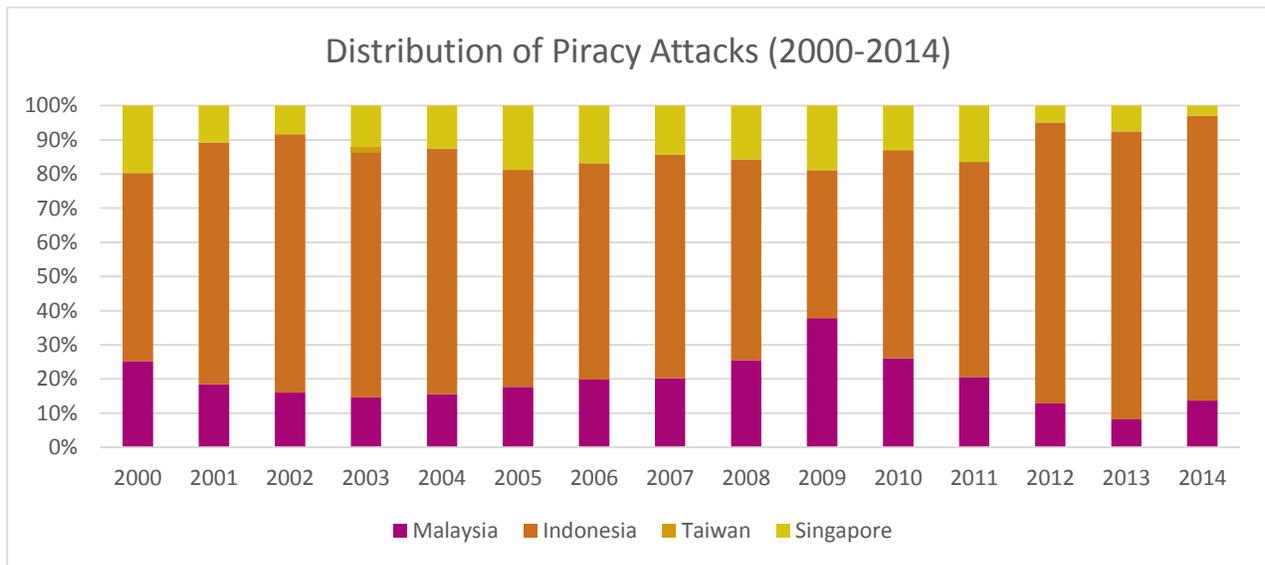
Whereas Taiwan, had no recorded attacks in this time period, Indonesia consistently recorded the most attacks annually – more than the other countries combined. Since 2000, there have been 1,282 piracy events near Indonesia. In 2013 alone, 145 attacks were reported.



These declines in piracy are largely due to extensive international cooperation. Counter-piracy cooperation in Asia began in the 1990s between Japan and China—two countries with a very contentious relationship—through Chinese law enforcement and Japan’s Maritime Safety Agency, which was renamed to Japan Coast Guard in 2000. The most successful counter-piracy cooperation in the region is the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), which covers parts of the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, the Straits of Malacca, Gulf of Thailand, South China Sea, Sulu Sea, Philippine Sea, East China Sea, Yellow Sea and Sea of Japan. ReCAAP began in 2004 with eight ASEAN members and has expanded to 19 signatories, including the China, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Despite being a part of ASEAN, neither Malaysia nor Indonesia are signatory states; Malaysia will not join ReCAAP as long as the agreement’s hub is in Singapore whereas Indonesia objection’s stem from its concerns about maintaining its sovereignty.

The cornerstone of ReCAAP’s success as a cooperative framework is the Information Network System (IFN), a 24-hour, web-based system that enables the collection, analysis and distribution of piracy information among ReCAAP member countries through the Information Sharing Center (ISC). The IFN and ISC improves the functionality of multilateral counter-piracy operations considerably: If a pirate vessel exits the maritime jurisdiction of a ReCAAP member state, the ISC notifies the nearest relevant authority in a member state to continue the pursuit. Despite not being members of ReCAAP, both Indonesia and Malaysia actively share information with the ISC and Malaysia created its coast guard, the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, in 2005.

Although each of the countries experiencing piracy were able to decrease the total number of attacks over time, it was Singapore that made the most relative progress. The figure below shows that Indonesia bears the brunt of any extant piracy and that Singapore has almost completely eradicated pirate operations in its waters by 2012.



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